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IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An axle assembly comprising:

an axle housing comprising a first plate spaced away from a second plate to define a first segment and a second segment; ~~and~~

a torque plate fixed to each of said first segment and said second segment ~~segments~~ along a portion of said axle housing mounted at least partially between said first plate and said second plate ~~plates~~; and

a spindle assembly fixed to each of said first segment and said second segment, wherein said spindle assembly includes a spindle housing and said torque plate includes an opening through which said spindle assembly extends and said axle housing includes a partial opening along a bottom portion adjacent each of said first segment and said second segment for receiving a portion of said spindle housing.

2. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The assembly of claim 1, wherein ~~said~~ each torque plate includes ~~comprises~~ an opening for mounting of a brake assembly.

3. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The assembly of claim 2, wherein ~~said~~ each torque plate includes ~~comprises~~ at least one extending flange, said at least one extending flange including ~~comprising~~ mounting openings for said brake assembly.

4-6. (CANCELLED)

7. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The assembly recited in ~~claim 6~~ claim 1, wherein said spindle housing is welded to a surface of said axle housing transverse to said first plate and said second plate ~~plates~~.

8. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The assembly recited in ~~claim 6~~ claim 1, wherein said axle housing comprises a front plate and a back plate ~~plates~~ spaced apart from each other by a distance defining an opening corresponding to a width of said spindle housing.

9. (ORIGINAL) The assembly of claim 1, further comprising a brake assembly mounted to each of said torque plates.

10. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A method of fabricating a non-driven axle assembly comprising the steps of:

a.) forming a substantially rectangular housing comprising a first plate spaced apart from a second plate to define an open first segment and an open second segment ~~segments~~ and at least a partially open bottom;

b.) welding a torque plate transverse to said first plate and said second plate ~~plates~~ over each of said open first segment and said open second segment ~~segments~~, wherein said torque plate includes at least one mounting flange; and

c.) mounting a brake assembly to each of said torque plates including fixing said brake assembly to said at least one mounting flange.

11. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 10, further comprising the step of installing a spindle assembly to each of said open first segment and said open second ~~segments~~ segment.

12. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 11, wherein each of said spindle assemblies comprises a spindle and a spindle housing, and ~~said~~ each torque plate defines an opening for said spindle, said method further comprising the step of inserting said spindle through said opening in said torque plate and fixing said spindle housing to said rectangular housing.

13. (CANCELLED)

14. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) ~~The method of claim 10,~~ A method of fabricating a non-driven axle assembly comprising the steps of:

a.) forming a substantially rectangular housing ~~wherein step a.) comprises forming said housing~~ as an inverted U-shape comprising a first plate spaced apart from a second plate to define an open first segment and an open second segment ~~such that said open first and second segments are~~ disposed adjacent an axis of rotation, ~~and~~ a center portion ~~of said housing is~~ spaced a distance away from said axis of rotation, and a partially open bottom;

b) welding a torque plate transverse to said first plate and said second plate over each of said open first segment and said open second segment; and

c) mounting a brake assembly to each of said torque plates.

15. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A method of fabricating a non-driven axle assembly comprising the steps of:

a) constructing an axle housing having first and second segments, and a bottom surface, said first and second segments defining an opening, and at least a portion of said bottom surface defining an opening;

b) fixing torque plates adjacent said first and second segments of said ~~an~~ axle housing;

c.) fitting at least a portion of a tubular housing into said opening defined by said bottom surface of said axle housing;

d.) attaching said torque plates to said first and second segments of said axle housing; and

e.) removing a portion of said tubular housing between said first and second segments of said axle housing.

16. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 15, wherein a cross-section of said axle housing is substantially rectangular.

17. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The method of claim 15, wherein said tubular housing includes spindles disposed at each of said first and second segments.

18. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 15, wherein a remaining portion of said axle housing comprises a portion of said bottom surface of said axle housing.

19. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 15, wherein said torque plates ~~closes~~close off said openings~~opening~~ at said first and second segments of said axle housing.